

Matthew 4:12-23

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the call remains

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One of the blessings of our congregation is the number of nations that are represented by our members. We come from east and west, north and south. From the United States of America *and* the Democratic Republic of Congo, from Brazil *and* Taiwan, from Australia *and* Haiti, from Cameroon *and* China. Each time we gather I am reminded of that prophecy of Isaiah that the light of the Lord has shone upon all the nations of the world. I am reminded each Sunday, that the Body of Christ brings together people from every nation in the world. In this Body, says Saint Paul, we find our unity, not in the particular nation from which we have come. This is important because on any given Sunday some nation, somewhere, is undergoing significant changes or turmoil. Our prayers reflect the concerns.

It's also important to remember that Presidents come *and* go. My first day at Saint Mark was the inauguration of George W. Bush; an inauguration, you will recall, that was fraught with worry and division. Then it was hanging chads and the legitimacy of the President. So Presidents come and go. This is history. ***What remains constant among the passing moments of history is the call of Jesus and the journey of discipleship.***

From the very beginning of the story of God with us, there has been this tension between the passing political events of history and the work of the people of God. We see this in the Old Testament as Israel's prophets confront Israel's kings repeatedly whenever they go astray. The same may be said for the people of God: whenever they given allegiance to idols or kings that have drifted away from God, the prophets appear to call them back to the covenant with God. This past week the Monday night bible study has been reading of this saga told in books of Second Samuel and First and Second Kings. It's sobering reading and, again, a reminder that as history unfolds the people of God always have a particular calling to remain faithful to God and the covenant community. When that calling is abandoned, things do not go well for anyone. And if we don't recognize that, along come the prophets to warn us. Elijah and Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Amos and Hosea. They remind us what is constant among the passing events of history: the call of God.

Along comes Jesus, whom Matthew names "*God-with-us*", at the very time John the Baptist has been thrown in prison for challenging the reigning King Herod for his immoral practices. Eventually, John will literally lose his head for his prophetic practice of confronting the king. This tension remains when Jesus, *God-with-us*, comes to a set of ordinary fisherman. They are going about the work of their lives when he calls them to follow him into the adventure of discipleship. *Follow me*, Jesus says. And, to our astonishment, they do. They hear the call of Jesus as a summons into a new way of life. This way of life *is* discipleship. Jesus doesn't give a lot of details to those early followers – not a road map or itinerary or a strategic plan. He only

calls them follow him and promises he will give them a vocation to share this life with others. Their previous life as fishermen will now be transformed from the inside out.

This call of Jesus into a life of discipleship is what remains constant for all Christians. Please don't be flummoxed by the disciples quitting their jobs, or think of it as a reason to ignore the call of Christ. It's not necessary to quite your job to be a disciple, though some of you might want to do that! Following him in the great adventure of our lives. We do not know where Jesus will lead us and precisely what the adventure entails. We only know that as we follow him the way unfolds before us, step by step. When I walked the Camino de Santiago, I learned a phrase from the poet Rumi that has been helpful in understanding the call of Jesus. "As you start to walk on the way, the way appears."

We don't often know the future. We live in turbulent times, fraught with fear and anxiety. Yet, this has always been true for the followers of Jesus. As the martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in his own turbulent times, "If we answer the call to discipleship, where will it lead us? What decisions and partings will it demand? To answer this question we shall have to go with him, only he knows the answer. Only Jesus Christ, who bids us follow him, knows the journey's end." And considering the times he was living through in Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer said, "We do know the journey of discipleship will be a road of boundless mercy. Discipleship means joy."

I love this notion that as you and I follow Jesus, trusting our lives to him, we will experience *joy*. Happiness tends to come and go as easily as the weather changes. In fact, happiness is often determined by the weather! Joy is deeper than happiness. It is the abiding sense of contentment, like the calm that abides underneath a stormy sea. Joy is born of trust in God. It is what remains as you answer the call of Jesus.

The entire Christian life for each and everyone of us is an adventure in discipleship. It is answering Jesus call to be his messengers of love, mercy, compassion and kindness. In a world where people are lost and broken by anger and fear, loneliness and anxiety – the disciples of Jesus share a new and better way. It's called the adventure of discipleship, and at its heart is joy.

Follow me, says Jesus. And as you do, the way becomes clear.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.